

## Engaging members as we develop our democracy

### 1. Background

- 1.1. *Our Strategy* commits us to having the strongest and most inclusive democracy of any students' union in the UK. As well as improving engagement in elections, we have identified a need to develop our democracy in other ways, including engaging underrepresented groups, improving our policy-making process, and updating our governing documents.
- 1.2. At least two discrete projects are currently being progressed through working groups:
  - 1.2.1. Implementing the outcomes of our Liberation Review – changing how we interact with students from our BME, LGBT+, international, disabled and other communities.
  - 1.2.2. Undertaking a Governance Review – taking the opportunity provided by a requirement to re-approve our Constitution and Bye-laws to make changes to important content such as Union Council, student discipline, elections and officer positions.
- 1.3. Additionally, there is a renewed organisational focus on embedding our value of *democracy*, such as changes to our election cycles, new resource for a part-time Democracy Coordinator, and improvements to the support and communication of Union Council and its subcommittees; these have been referred to as a 'Democracy Review' although this project is less well-defined than the above two.
- 1.4. As any successful improvements to our democracy cannot succeed without meaningful consultation with our members, a single, coherent communication plan is required that distils the above projects into one set of effective messages and engagement methods.
- 1.5. Otherwise, there is a risk that members are disengaged and their contributions are lost through conflicting, confusing or excessive messaging from Imperial College Union regarding changes to their democracy.

### 2. Proposal

- 2.1. As recommended by Communications Committee in October 2017, there should be only one integrated membership-facing communication plan for all of the above projects.
- 2.2. The opportunity should be taken to emphasise the long-term benefits we hope to achieve through these projects, rather than putting the focus on operational changes we might make.
  - 2.2.1. Frames and basic messages should be those that amplify existing positive messages
    - 2.2.1.1. Core message should build on *For You*, the first theme in *Our Strategy* – “to increase our reach to all students and ensure we are making a difference to their lives, no matter their location or level of study”.

- 2.2.1.2. Messages should focus on members rather than the organisation – centring the reader rather than us. We should emphasise the existing and potential benefits made to their lives and student experience, rather than to our own standing or performance.
- 2.2.2. Frames and messages to avoid include ones that inadvertently reinforce existing preconceptions relating to Imperial College Union, such as:
  - 2.2.2.1. Bureaucracy – we should de-emphasise the constitution & bye-laws, working groups and internal processes involved in these projects. Additionally, The language we use internally for these projects is not always appropriate for communicating with our members; we should avoid jargon and uninspiring terminology – *constitution, procedure, engagement, governance, etc.*
  - 2.2.2.2. Irrelevance – we should counter the idea that changes to ICU will not affect the lives of students by emphasising the impact we already have on student lives.
  - 2.2.2.3. Fragmentation – we should counter the trend of students not recognising the role that ICU plays in student life, for example when students view CSPs, Constituent Unions and Imperial College Union itself as a series of separate groups rather than one coherent organisation.
- 2.2.3. Audiences should be determined, segmenting our membership and ensuring they are targeted with relevant messages.
- 2.2.4. Static online content should be generated, to support further timely communication through social media, emails, blogs and direct contact such as focus groups.
- 2.3. A single communications and messaging grid should be agreed, to be used alongside the implementation plan.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. That Communications Committee discuss and approve the above proposal.
- 3.2. That Communications Committee discuss potential messages for communicating these projects.
- 3.3. That Communications Committee discuss how to manage a single communications plan that spans two working groups.